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Atari Online News, Etc.
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->From the Editor’s Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
"""""""""""""""""""""""""""""

I remember hearing about it when I was younger. I believe that the ancient ones called it "Sol". It does exist, I saw it today - the sun! Tell Noah that he can stop building the ark - the rains have stopped, at least for the next few days. Spring, that elusive season in New England the past few years, appears to be making more than just an appearance! So, can you tell I’m sick of the lousy weather we’ve been having the past few months?

There’s a non-scientific term for this malady - it’s called "cabin fever" from what I’ve heard. We’re all cooped up during the winter (unless you’re a skier or something), and yearn for the warmth and length of Spring days. They’re coming. It’s great to see the sun setting later and later each day, rising higher in the sky. No longer must we bundle up in the middle of the night just to get a drink of water. No longer are we driving to work in the dark, and in the same on the way home. It’s been a long winter...

It’s been a rough week for me, as if you couldn’t already tell. Things at work have been a drain - typical employee issues, multiplied by three. Our furnace went out earlier in the week, but fortunately the temperatures outside rose rather than fell. I just want to be able to get outside, play in the garden and do some other work in or outside of the house. Maybe even get an early start to my golf game for the season. Sit out on the new sun room without the heater on. Yes, we needed the rain - we always do. But, we’ve earned some nice, sunny days as well. I’m ready for a nice long warm and sunny holiday weekend (Patriot’s Day in Massachusetts!).

Until next time...

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New Version of Highwire Web Browser

The web browser and HTML Viewer "HighWire" has been upgraded to v0.1.7. This is an important update, which addresses issues as better CSS compatibility and better PNG support.

http://highwire.atari.org/

Final Version of UVK Released

There really have’t been any new viruses on the Atari platform in quite a while...which is a very good thing. There were a few little things that still needed to be fixed in the "Ultimate Virus Killer" 2000 code, though, and it also needed to have the contact details made ’future proof’.

The new version, 9.0 was released today, April 12th. The version jump from 8.2 is to signify it’s the final version. It is still the definitive tool to keep your ST, TT, Falcon or derivative machine virus-free. With 14 years of development, it damn well should be.

http://www.uvk2000.com/

Troll - New Usenet Client

Rajah Lone, mostly known for his GEM Dungeon Master port has released a Usenet ’news’ client called Troll for Atari GEM.

Troll works with STiNG and STiK stacks, and will probably work with GlueSTiK as well. So far only reading of Usenet messages is possible, writing is planned for future versions.

http://membres.lycos.fr/nef

Final Release Tempus-Word NG 5.30 - ENGLISH available!

The Final English Release of Tempus-Word is available:

  http://www.tempus-word.de/en/index.htm

For technical reasons the purchase possibility will exist
for licence key only in the course of the next week.
Already now, however, a demo is a version which can be
unlocked with a license key, is available for download.

  Norbert Simon
  Tempus Word Project

Memories from an ANALOG / Antic author

James Hague, who wrote many memorable games for the Atari 8-bit home computers, and who also runs the great Giant List of Classic Game Programmers, just put up an article about the 8-bit games he wrote for the Atari magazines ANALOG Computing and Antic.

http://www.dadgum.com/giantlist/archive/hague.html

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. This is going to be another one of those weeks when I don't really have a lot to say. Of course the damp, rainy weather is affecting the herniated disc in my neck, but that's par for the course here in New England.

I would also like to mention the SETI@home project that we've talked about before. The project managers and powers that be are moving to new software to search through data gathered through the Arecibo radio telescope in Puerto Rico. The object is to find a non-natural radio signal of extra-solar origin. Yep, we're looking for a broadcast from ET.

The TEAM ATARI search group has so far contributed more than 210 years of CPU time to the project, and I sincerely hope that the 68 other members of the team continue to use their computers to search.

The reason I'm mentioning it is that the source code for this new generation of software is being released to the public. So it's possible... just possible, mind you, that there could be a version for at least some Atari computers!!

There's nothing carved in stone, and not even an in-depth analysis of whether or not it's going to actually be possible, but at least this time there's hope. If you're interested in participating in the current and/or future SETI@home search, point your browser to http://setiathome.ssl.berkeley.edu (current version) or http://boinc.berkeley.edu/index.html (future version).

And of course I hope that if you do that you decide to join TEAM ATARI!

Let's get to the news, hints, tips and info from the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup
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Markus Lindstrom asks about floppy disk formats:

"I just wanted to ask a simple question: which format does the Atari ST use for its floppy disks? I'm asking this on behalf of a good friend of mine who tries to "revive" his memories, stuck on dusty disks.

Windows doesn't seem able to read it, so I'm guessing it's not the classic FAT format.

Is there any way to read them? Or even better, does anyone know if Linux supports this format?"

Kenneth Medin tells Markus:

"There are lots of variants but most are actually FAT. Some games disks use other formats. There may be from 9 up to 11 sectors on each track but most Windows versions can only cope with the standard 9 sectors format.

If the disks were made on a pre TOS 1.4 Atari (before 1989) you can't normally read them unaltered in MSDOS or Windows.

Floppies formatted in the standard desktop on TOS 1.4 and onwards should work in Windows. Just tried a 720 DD disk in Windows 2000 without errors.

For safety keep the floppy WRITE PROTECTED all the time. Windows tends to write to the floppy without notice!

My pc did not recognize anything but a standard HD 1440 floppy when I booted into Linux and just tried a "mount /floppy" command. I guess it can be done by adding to the kernel...

Just for fun I also booted my Atari TT into m68-k Linux and yes, both DD and HD floppies works fine. Even tried with an old floppy last written to in 1990 on my TOS 1.2 MegaST from 1987 and it mounted fine.

Both the pc and Atari are running Debian Sarge.

Back to Win2000 and running Gemulator2000 emulator from http://www.emulators.com :

To my surprise i could not read old floppies from TOS 1.2 at all. This was in "Atari disk mode".

Rebooted to Win98 (I have 4 OS'es on the pc!) and as expected no luck with the old floppies.

Launched "Gemulator Explorer" which is supposed to be a tool to read non MSDOS floppies. Here the old floppies showed up but with garbled filenames as long as they were 9 sector formatted. Also tried DD floppies with 10 and 11 sectors but nothing except strange sounds from the drive... These floppies were formatted with FcopyProIII.

As a last resort I booted the Aranym liveCD that contains a minimal Knoppix Linux dist with an Atari "virtual machine"/emulator right from the CD. You can get it from http://aranym.sourceforge.net/livecd.html with the actual CD ISO file from http://sup.zln.cz/~joy/livecd.html .

Finally some luck! My old TOS 1.2 floppies read just fine as long as they were standard 9 sector/track formatted! When I tried disks with 10 and 11 sector formats I got an error message and an empty window.

Note that all floppies worked just fine on my Atari TT running Magic with a HD 1440 drive.

Conclusion: If you can't read the floppy from the Windows -98 or -2000 desktop only Aranym might be able to. Extended formats can't be read at all.

There are other tools I have not tried like the STeem emulator.

After posting this I really have to reboot and check how Debian m68-k reacts on the 10 and 11 sector floppies on the very same TT they were formatted on..."

Rod Smith adds this interesting tidbit:

"For what it's worth, I just tested on a Gentoo system running a 2.6.3 kernel on an AMD64 computer. I had no problems reading an ST-formatted ~790KB disk, although access was slow. (I don't recall what I used to format that disk, but obviously it was some form of extended format.) Single-sided floppies gave me problems, though. I suspect that creating an appropriate device file and using it rather than the stock /dev/fd0 would give better results with them, but I don't know offhand what device major and minor numbers would be required, or if this feature is supported at all.

I don't know why you didn't have better luck with 720KB Atari floppies under Linux, unless by "anything but a standard HD 1440 floppy" you meant you tried single-sided disks. I've never had trouble with 720KB DOS floppies under Linux, and if the Linux FAT driver can cope with the Atari FAT format's peculiarities, I don't expect it'd have problems with 720KB Atari disks. I don't believe there are any Linux kernel options relating to this support. It's conceivable, though, that we're now well enough beyond the double density days that chipset manufacturers are starting to skimp on support for that format, and that you happen to have a chipset that's so affected. This is HIGHLY speculative, though."

David Bolt adds:

"I've had almost no difficulties with discs, although it did take a few attempts to find the right device to handle single sided discs[0].

If it's already there, try mounting single-sided discs using /dev/fd0u360. If it's not, and it should be since it's been there in all the SuSE, RedHat and Debian systems I've used, create it under /dev with major 2, minor 12.

The Linux FAT driver has handled all the different Atari formats I've thrown at it, with just a couple of exceptions.

The first is where I've formatted, and written to discs where the number of tracks is more than 82. Some drives were able to read the last few tracks, some can't, but this is a physical limitation of the drives and I stopped using such extended formats after being bitten by it when I was using an old STFM and external drive[1].

The second is using 11-sector DD formats, or 21/22-sector HD formats, where this can often be very hit and miss.

I think this may be just speculation. All the boards I've used, including my latest Nforce[2] board, has no problems reading Atari.

[0] After a hunt I managed to find one of the few remaining SSDD discs I still have, just to check my memory. Thankfully, I still have one, and my memory wasn't far off[3].

[1] IIRC it was an old Power Computing thing which took power from the joystick port and could handle 84 tracks easily, used in conjunction with an internal single sided drive until I replaced it with a double sided drive. That’s when the internal drives limitation bit me, since that couldn’t read past 82 tracks.

[2] Six months old and I seriously regret buying it. It’s a pain to keep having to redo the setup with every kernel upgrade because NVidia haven’t released their drivers as open source.

[3] I almost had the device right. Since it’s been a while, I tried fd0d360 instead of fd0u360."

Rod Smith adds an addendum:

"I ended up firing up my TT030, and discovered that *IT* couldn’t read these disks, either. I’m starting to wonder if I might have used some weird 400KB format or some such; it’s been about 18 years, so I might have forgotten such details. I’ve got about half a dozen of these floppies left, so I doubt if it was just one disk gone bad. (Fortunately, I’ve got backups on other media.)

In any event, I used the TT to create a new single-sided 360KB disk, and was able to read it in Linux on my AMD64 system with no problems. Of course, the TT’s version of TOS is far more recent than that on any system that would normally use a 360KB format, but given that you say you’ve done this pretty extensively, I doubt if that’s really an issue.

The AMD64 test system I used is obviously quite new, too. Still, some chipset manufacturers might conceivably have begun quietly dropping DD floppy support while others continue it. I think this is unlikely, but it’s conceivable.

These specific-size device identifiers vary a lot, from distribution to distribution and/or over time. I believe I’ve seen both "d" and "u" in that position."

Ian McCall asks us to think back and come up with the name of a game:

"I’m trying to track down a game. This would be a very early ST game, and it had a first person view where you fired energy balls (which bounced) at a variety of mostly geometric-shaped foes. Set in a desert, as far as I recall.

I realise this isn’t much to go on, but it’s hard to describe and my memory isn’t great. I believe you manned a gun emplacement, though you couldn’t see it. It was set on an alien world, was in a desert I believe (had a sand-coloured grand, I’m sure) and, as I mentioned, your ammo used to be in the shape of a ball and it bounced. I’m pretty sure that all of the foes were geometric shapes, but I could be wrong about that.

Any clues? Any questions? Thanks in advance for any information."

’Chris’ guesses:

"Backlash by novagen?"

Ian replies:

"Perfect. How on earth you got that from my rather poorly described post I'll never know, but thanks for doing it."

Chris tells Ian:

"The desert bit did it.

It had a prequel too, Encounter I think. I remember playing it on... ahem, the C64.."

Sam F. asks about the Falcon's video:

"What do I need to get the Falcon's video to, say oh, 1024x768x32bit color? Or just get it to 32bit color?

I'm currently using Magic v5 os, and I want to use a couple of my Seattle Seahawks backgrounds, but when I convert the jpegs to img format and use them, the color is not as good and it's too big to fit on the screen."

'Sylwek' tells Sam:

"The only way is to get Eclipse PCI expansion board and ATI Rage graphics card - but you'd have to put Falcon in bigger case then. Read here more: http://website.lineone.net/~cortex/pages/eclipse.htm ."

Richard Karsmakers posts this about Ultimate Virus Killer:

"The other day I updated the Ultimate Virus Killer. Version 9.0 can be found at www.uvk2000.com. Check it out."

Bernd Maedicke tries and tells Richard:

"this website is down. Where can I found the last UVK 2000 version now?"

Martin Byttebier tells Bernd:

"Since when? A few seconds ago (19:41) I went to www.uvk2000.com and I could retrieve the latest version."

Tom McEwan asks about spiffing up his ST monitor:

"I've noticed when using my ST with an RGB monitor that it seems quite incapable of displaying an actually black screen, the closest it can get is a dark grey, which is kind of annoying (especially playing space games!), and I wondered if anyone here could help.

The screen and cables are probably ok, because with the ST switched off the screen does go properly blank (ie, completely black) Otherwise the graphics seem more or less alright (signal cuts out or rolls for a couple

of seconds occasionally, perhaps there's also a dry joint somewhere in the synchro circuits). Is this a known problem with aging STs (or just STs in general - I have heard that Atari's 8 bit machines were notorious for having poor video interface circuits, but I've never used one myself), or is there more likely to be something wrong with my video cables somewhere? I've checked continuity with a multimeter, the ground line appears to be connected ok, so my initial hypothesis that it might be floating somewhere because of a broken wire is probably wrong.

Can anyone suggest anything?

By the way, a colleague at work today mentioned a machine made in the 16 bit period (68000 based) that seems to have been completely overshadowed by the giants of the era, the Amiga and ST, the machine in question being a Sinclair "QL". Can anyone tell me anything about these things? I've never heard of them before. Maybe google will turn up something interesting."

Coda tells Tom:

"Its more likely to be the monitor. If you cant get rid of it with brightness/contrast controls then you maybe able to adjust the pots inside the case but I wouldn't recommend it unless you are comfortable working around mains voltages.

The sinclair QL was a 68008 based machine. It was Sinclair's last attempt at making a serious use i.e not for games - home computer, which was Clive Sinclair's intention with the Spectrum. Not really a 16bit machine, depends on what your definition is. The 68008 cpu was only 8-bits wide on the data bus, but apart from that it was the same as a 68000 inside (with 32bit registers)."

Well folks, that's it for this time around. Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - "Far Cry"!! 'Astro Boy'!
"Far Cry"!! 'Astro Boy'!
"The Hobbit" on Xbox!
Ubi Soft and the Army!
And much more!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!

’Far Cry’ Game Challenging, Gorgeous

"Far Cry" is a challenging, gorgeous new video game that should please first-person shooter fans - provided you have a powerful computer and a stomach for cliched science fiction.

This time, it’s sailor Jack Carver who gets caught in a conspiracy involving genetically altered soldiers gone haywire, megalomaniacal corporate bosses and shady government operatives.

I’ve played through similar video game scenarios countless times. In a slight innovation for the genre, "Far Cry" is set in a chain of tropical islands instead of the usual derelict space ship or hellish dungeon.

The lush outdoor environments let "Far Cry" flex some impressive graphic muscle. Water ripples, splashes and shimmers like it does in the real world. Surfaces like metal machines and ancient stone statues are etched with tiny cracks, pock marks and other detail.

The creators at Crytek have even brought new beauty to palm trees, which gently sway in tropical breezes.

Whether you’re prancing through the jungle or crawling through subterranean catacombs, the levels are enormous.

Look down in this three-dimensional world and you’ll see whiskers of grass growing at your feet. Peer toward the horizon to gaze at distant mountaintops.

Listen, and you’ll hear a symphonic cacophony of tropical birds and insects chattering all around you.

Soaking in all this atmosphere is enjoyable, but the point of the game is beating the bad guys, of course.

The enemies are plentiful and fairly smart. They work in teams to kill you, and once you’ve been spotted, the bad guys will duck behind trees for cover as they advance on your position.

"Far Cry" accounts for gravity better than most games. You can push barrels and watch them roll down stairs, for example.

Playing "Far Cry" on anything less than the most powerful computer will surely bring tears to your eyes.

On my aging, 1.5 gigahertz Pentium 4, load times between levels were measured in minutes instead of seconds. Often, I was able to walk to the kitchen, grab a fresh cup of coffee, and return to find the game still loading.

Games sometimes became slow and choppy during battles involving lots of monsters, soldiers and wide-open spaces. I suppose it’s understandable though, because "Far Cry" really pushes the visual envelope.

A version for PlayStation2 and Xbox called "Far Cry Instincts" is in the works but no release date has been announced.

Once you’ve solved the single-player mode, "Far Cry" provides endless

replay value with online matches against as many as 20 others. There’s even a bonus program that lets you design your own levels.

We’ve been hearing about the splendor of supposedly revolutionary games like "Half-Life 2" and "Doom III" for more than a year now, but they still haven’t hit store shelves.

Impatient gamers needn’t fret. This $40, M-rated game for the PC delivers now on the promise of groundbreaking graphics.

Three stars out of four.

The Hobbit Xbox Review

Inevitably in the current storm of "Lord of the Rings"-inspired movies, music, and games, it was inevitable that the gaming community would see a game featuring Bilbo Baggins, uncle to Frodo (yeah, the Frodo from the movies). Inevitable Entertainment put together a game that would be different than the Electronic Arts action games, hoping to be the one game to rule them all. If you’re a fan of RPG elements, but don’t have the tedious and technical sensibilities that RPGs usually require you to have, you may enjoy this game. Likewise, if you’ve got a nephew who enjoys platform games with moments of depth, "The Hobbit" may end up a good birthday gift.

The story begins with Shire resident Bilbo Baggins enjoying another lazy day. The wizard Gandalf arrives, and as you guessed, invites (well, forces, in this case) Bilbo to accompany a group of dwarves on a journey. While it takes some time for the game to pick up and move, the initial Shire level allows for gameplay that smacks of Nintendo’s "Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker," as well as an odd combo of choose-your-favorite-platform and "Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic." I realize that this is an odd combination to envision, but think of cartoony graphics, lots of jumping from platform to platform, and a few "collect this, bring it to him" missions, and you’ve got "The Hobbit." You’ll be using your staff and glowing orc sword for melee combat, and you can throw stones at enemies further away. You’ll collect courage points that give you more power, and you’ll be able to save your game through the use of plentiful savepoints. Throw in a slightly maddening camera and you’re set. You’ll travel to locations specifically described in J.R.R. Tolkien’s book, as well as locations that are NOT-so described in the book. As well, you’ll meet characters with which you’ve come to be acquainted through the other "Rings" media, though with these graphics, even characters like Gollum tend to make you wonder if Inevitable Entertainment took more cues from the "Hobbit" book or the "Rings" movies. In fact, even some departures from the story are taken, and that may trouble some of the books’ fans.

How much is too much? Though a lot of the elements of "The Hobbit" sucked me in and held my attention, I couldn’t help but feel like it was missing something. Many levels have that standard platform style, and include back-and-forth missions, mow-through-enemies missions, and even every developer’s new favorite fetish, stealth missions. Still, something was missing. Puzzles lacked depth and were a bit easy. Battles were very straightforward. The overall speed of the game felt uneven. My initial comment to someone was "this game’s momentum falls in no-man’s land, it isn’t slow and deep enough to be an action/RPG, and it’s not fast and fierce enough to be an action/adventure game." "The Hobbit" is always right

on the cusp of a genre, but then the momentum slows down or speeds up, and you're jarred. For some, this jarring is a good thing, it keeps them happy with the game's constantly-changing modalities. For me, however, I get jarred and then want to play a more dedicated game.

The graphics are shocking at first for those who have played the Electronic Arts games and have seen the movies. Cartoony and colorful, they contrast with the dark and sparse world you've seen in other media. After the shock of the style wears down, you'll begin to appreciate the smaller nuances that can be afforded in this style. More cartoony environmental effects (like a swarm of colorful butterflies in the distance) can be effectively used. As well, you'll have panoramic views at times where four or five things are happening in front of you, the river's running, a waterwheel's spinning, butterflies pass by, a villager walks away in the distance, and you're collecting coins in the foreground. Items blend in better in this style. In some ways, even the small, stout characters fit the voice-overs more closely than the other games. Enemies are well-drawn (though do we REALLY need another game with spider enemies?), and the animations were fluid (most of the time--screen clutter will slow the rate down a bit). There are minor anomalies in the graphical engine, the same thing that plagues EVERY developer when dealing with independently-thinking AI and a trigger-happy player: enemies (or you) will clip on a wall, and other times, fall down and lose portions of the character model in the wall. Minor stuff like that. But overall, I thought the graphics were what made the game stand out.

The sound is less impressive than the graphics. Though at times I really enjoyed the soundtrack, I almost wanted more. The vocal acting fit very well in this game, something afforded to cartoony games more than the realistic ones. The immediate sound effects were standard fare - the growling, clanking, footsteps and such--but I've been relatively unimpressed with sound effects as a whole lately, so maybe it's just my bias. The environmental effects were a nice touch, but still nothing you haven't heard before. The sound seems to complement the graphics in lieu of standing out on its own...which is fine, I suppose.

So in the end, would you want to play "The Hobbit"? Sure, maybe. At its heart, it's a platformer, but it has these odd elements of action/RPG and action/adventure that, if accentuated, would have made for a deep and truly pleasurable experience. But as it stands, I felt that "The Hobbit" came together to create a game that I could enjoy. If I were a tad younger or it had predated the popular movies, the game might have done better with fans of the book. For younger players, this game might be an incredible hit, since it never fluctuates out of a rational difficulty, and it is a constant world. Also, it appears to be one of the Xbox's few platform games, which will give Xboxers a unique experience among the other games. Rent it for yourself and see if you think "The Hobbit" is the one "Rings" game to rule them all, or if it's just a "Wind Waker" knockoff.

Ratings (1-10):

Graphics: 7. At first shocking, the environments and their effects become pleasing.

Sound: 7. In short, it's more than fair.

Gameplay: 6. Pulling elements from Nintendo's "Wind Waker" and other games, but still missing something.

Story: 7. Interesting, but not without problems. Fans of the book will

recognize some areas, but not all.

Replayability: 5. Unless you’re a perfectionist, you probably won’t return to this game.

Overall: 6 (not an average). While the elements of this game are fairly unimpressive, the game as a whole is still engrossing.

Astro Boy Pushed Back for PS2, GBA

Sega of America announced that two upcoming titles, Astro Boy on PlayStation 2 computer entertainment system and Astro Boy: Omega Factor on Game Boy Advance, will ship in August 2004 rather than July.

"SEGA has been presented with several exciting summer promotions for Astro Boy," said Scott A. Steinberg, Vice President of Entertainment Marketing, SEGA of America, Inc. "We have decided to better align the launch of these skus with our marketing partners and take full advantage of the back-to-school retail season."

Astro Boy

Join Astro, the robotic superhero with a human mind, in a jet-fueled adventure to reunite the robotic race with humans. Working with Tezuka Productions and Sony Pictures Television, SEGA’s Sonic Team studio has faithfully recreated the Astro Boy universe, lending authenticity to the franchise and paying homage to a classic icon of Japanese anime that will be a featured series in Cartoon Network’s Tunami lineup in June.

Astro Boy: Omega Factor

Using his super abilities, Astro faces off against the likes of Atlas, Blue Knight, and over 40 other characters from Tezuka iconic anime franchise. Developed by Treasure in conjunction with Hitmaker, Astro Boy: Omega Factor brings classic 2D gaming to the GBA along with an original seven-episode story crafted from previous versions of the Astro Boy animated series.

Eidos Locks April 20 Ship Date for Hitman: Contracts in North America

Eidos, one of the world’s leading publishers and developers of entertainment software, today announced that its highly-anticipated, action-stealth game Hitman: Contracts, developed by IO Interactive, has gone gold for the PlayStation(R)2 computer entertainment system, the Xbox video game system from Microsoft and the PC and will be available at retail beginning April 21, 2004 in North America. The release of Hitman: Contracts will be supported by a massive multi-million dollar marketing campaign - one of the largest to-date by Eidos North America.

"As the follow-up to the multi-million unit selling Hitman 2: Silent Assassin, Hitman: Contracts is one of this year’s ’must-have’ titles for gamers. Eidos will unleash an exciting marketing campaign with tremendous reach and frequency to back the next installment," said Paul Baldwin, Vice President of Marketing for Eidos Inc.

Hitman: Contracts will be backed by an in-depth marketing campaign encompassing television, radio, print, online, channel and public relations activities. The multi-million dollar "make the hit" television campaign features four different 15 and 30-second spots, which will run for a total of six weeks beginning two weeks prior to the game's in-store date. The radio campaign will run nationwide for two months on the Howard Stern Show, and it will feature live reads and sponsorship in the second annual "Mrs. Butterface" contest during the week of May 10, 2004. Hitman: Contracts' print effort includes ads slated to run in lifestyle publications such as FHM, Blender, Penthouse and Stuff magazines. Eidos will also achieve significant reach via major advertising for the game in all the gaming magazines.

Additionally, Eidos will charge a focused online campaign, part of which includes releasing the Hitman: Contracts television spot via Interscope Records and the 50 Cent and Eminem DeskSite units. DeskSite is a highly-targeted, customizable, opt-in software program that automatically delivers full-screen, broadcast-quality video entertainment directly to the consumer's PC desktop.

On the channel front, major retail promotions will flank high-impact frontline real estate at prominent retail venues such as Best Buy, EB Games, GameStop, Toys 'R' Us, Blockbuster, Hollywood Video and more. Eidos will back the Hitman: Contracts launch with pre-order incentives, employee sales programs, and top-tier in-store merchandising and national ad support. In addition, the title will be promoted via mainstream consumer and gaming focused comprehensive public relations campaigns.

Hitman: Contracts is the follow-up to Hitman 2: Silent Assassin, which to-date has sold more than three million copies since its release in November 2002. The game explores the dark psychology of killing for a living as the player takes on the role of the world's deadliest assassin, Agent 47. Hitman: Contracts promises to be the most disturbing and action-packed episode of the series. Hitman: Contracts is in development by IO Interactive, the Danish- based studio recently acquired by Eidos. Hitman: Contracts will ship throughout Europe beginning April 30.

Ubi Soft in Deal with U.S. Army on Computer Game

France's Ubi Soft and the United States Army said on Wednesday they had reached a long-term deal for the video games publisher to develop and publish games based on the popular "America's Army" video game.

Ubi Soft said the agreement was the first time the U.S. Army had ever exclusively licensed its brand to a game maker and that the deal would expand the reach of the game to console game players from its current base among personal computer gamers.

Ubi Soft said the deal would give console gamers the same "realistic, action-packed, military experience" that PC gamers get when they play the game.

The console game will be available in the summer of 2005.

Conceived partly as a recruiting tool by a colonel in the U.S. Army, the game has drawn more than 3.3 million players who have logged over 60 million hours of play since its public release in 2002, Ubi Soft said.

"The game is designed to provide young adults and their influencers with virtual insights into entry level soldier training, training in units and Army operations so as to provide insights into what the Army is like," the game's Web site said.

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

WWW Inventor Receives Technology Prize

The scientist credited with inventing the World Wide Web, Tim Berners-Lee, has been awarded the first Millennium Technology Prize.

The award, a euro1 million cash prize, equivalent to $1.2 million, is among the largest of its kind, and was awarded for the first time. It was established in 2002 and backed by the Finnish government.

Berners-Lee is recognized as the creator of the World Wide Web while working for the CERN Laboratory in the early 1990s, the European center for nuclear research near Geneva, Switzerland.

His graphical point-and-click browser, "WorldWideWeb," was the first featuring the core ideas included in today's Web browsers, including Internet Explorer, Netscape, Opera, and Mozilla.

The prize committee on Thursday said Berners-Lee's contribution strongly embodied the spirit of the award.

Pekka Tarjanne, chairman of the eight-member prize committee, underlined the importance of Berner-Lee's decision to never strive to commercialize or patent his contributions to the Internet technologies he developed.

The prize is administered by the Finnish Technology Award Foundation, an independent fund supported by the Finnish government and a number of Finnish companies and organizations. Future prizes will be awarded every two years.

This year, 74 nominations were received for the award. Universities, research institutes, and national scientific academies are eligible to nominate prize winners.

Berners-Lee, who is originally from Britain, continues to work at the standard-setting World Wide Web Consortium at Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

An award ceremony will be held June 15 in Helsinki.

Macworld Expo Boston Exhibitor List First Look

IDG World Expo on Monday offered a first look at some of the companies that will be exhibiting at this summer's Macworld Conference & Expo which is returning to Boston, Mass. from July 12 - 15, 2004 at the new Boston Convention & Exhibition Center.

Quark, Harman Multimedia and Xerox are headlining the event, with a sampling of other exhibitors including Alias, Belkin, Brenthaven, Disc Makers, DriveSavers Data Recovery, Guitar Center, Harmony Remote, Hash Inc., Iogear Inc., O'Reilly & Associates, Parliant Corp., Peachpit Press, Prosoft Engineering Inc., Roku, Sassafras Software Inc., Software MacKiev, Sonnet Technologies Inc. and Unitek.

"The Mac community on the East Coast is eagerly awaiting an event that provides hands-on access to exciting new technology solutions for the Mac, and Macworld Boston will not disappoint," said Warwick Davies, group vice president, IDG World Expo.

More information and registration details are available on the Macworld Expo Web site.

Australian Spam Act Goes Into Effect

As of last week, it becomes illegal to send spam from or to Australia. And Down Under, their definition of spam is a little tougher than U.S. laws have gotten us used to.

The Spam Act 0f 2003 covers all electronic communications, other than telemarketing or faxes. That means e-mails, mobile phone text messages (SMS), multimedia messaging (MMS) and instant messaging (IM). Any unsolicited commercial message is now considered spam, unless the sender is accurately identified and the message has a functional unsubscribe address. Not only that, there is no definition in Australian law of "bulk" spam: sending even a single unwanted message is enough to run you afoul of the law.

In fact, you don't even have to send spam to Australia to get caught. If you send spam to an e-mail address that is simply accessed in Australia (such as a Yahoo! account, which can be accessed from anywhere), you're in violation of the law. Imagine a spammer's surprise on his next vacation to Sydney, when he gets pulled out of line at the airport and taken away!

The only good news for spammers is that the maximum $1.1 million per day fine that will be levied against repeat spammers is in Australian money. So that's "only" about US$800,000 per day.

Bottom line: even though there are still loopholes in many of today's anti-spam laws, they are quickly being passed at the national level because everyone is affected by spam. Just wait until Singapore gets into the act.

Maryland Approves Tough Measure Against Spam

Maryland lawmakers approved a bill in the waning hours of the 2004 General Assembly session that one of the country's largest Internet service providers describes as a strong, comprehensive bill to prevent junk e-mail.

"What is does is crack down on fraudulent and deceptive practices that kingpin spammers use that are designed to defeat attempts by Internet service providers that block spam from coming in," Delegate Neil Quinter said Tuesday, just hours after his bill was approved by the legislature.

"Everybody who uses e-mail knows what a problem spam is these days," he said.

America Online praised the bill Tuesday for specifically prohibiting tactics spammers use to trick Internet service providers and their customers into opening their junk e-mail.

"This is yet another big step forward in the progress we are making state by state," Curtis Lu, deputy general counsel of AOL, said in a news release. "We have to continue our state campaigns to enact stringent junk e-mail laws with the sharpest of teeth, those that allow us to take outlaw spammers from behind computer screens and put them behind jail bars. The Maryland law does just that."

Quinter's bill and an identical Senate bill also passed just before the session ended at midnight Monday would, if signed by Gov. Robert Ehrlich, allow outlaw spammers to be sentenced to terms of up to 10 years in prison. It also provides for fines up to $25,000, and allows personal assets of spammers to be confiscated.

Quinter said the Maryland bill was patterned after a federal law signed by President Bush in December and a Virginia law that Gov. Mark Warner signed a year ago. Quinter said he and Senate sponsor Rob Garagiola conferred with lawmakers working on similar legislation in Minnesota, New Jersey and Ohio.

The Maryland bill would make it illegal for people who send unsolicited e-mail to disguise their identities by using false return addresses or misleading subject lines. It also would prohibit spammers from harvesting addresses from Web sites.

Gregg Massoni, Ehrlich's press secretary, said the governor will decide whether to sign it after his policy advisers and the state attorney general's office determine whether there are any legal problems with the legislation.

The governor is "very interested" in supporting information technology, but wants to make sure the bill would not harm legitimate businesses, Massoni said.

The criminal penalties imposed would be based on how many mailings were sent.

The bill empowers state officials to prosecute spammers even if they live outside Maryland.

FTC Says Pornographic 'Spam' Must Be Labeled

Pornographic "spam" e-mail will have to contain a warning on the subject

line so Internet users can easily filter it out, the U.S. Federal Trade Commission said on Tuesday.

Starting May 19, sexually explicit e-mail will have to bear a label reading "SEXUALLY-EXPLICIT:" and the messages themselves will not be allowed to contain graphic material, the FTC said.

Outrage over unsolicited pornography and other forms of junk e-mail spurred Congress to pass the first nationwide anti-spam law last year, which required the FTC to develop labels for smut.

An FTC study released last spring found that 17 percent of pornographic offers contained images of nudity that appeared whether a recipient wanted to see them or not.

The new rule is intended to change that. Pornographers will not be allowed to include sexually explicit pictures in the body of the message, though they will be allowed to include hyperlinks or other methods to access their material.

Like other e-mail marketers, they will also have to include their postal address and an easy way for recipients to opt out of future mailings.

The FTC proposed in January that pornographic messages be labeled "SEXUALLY-EXPLICIT-CONTENT:" but shortened the label in its final order to take up less space in the subject line.

Marketers will not be allowed to use explicit phrases in the subject line, the FTC said.

Several states have already passed laws requiring pornographic spam to bear an "ADV:ADULT" label or some variant, but they will be overridden by the federal standard.

Debunking the E-Mail Virus Sending Scam

Q. Why do I keep getting e-mails telling me I’ve been sending e-mail viruses to other people - usually folks I’ve never even heard of - although I know my computer isn’t infected?

A. This is happening often lately, and it is a corollary to another common scam - the fake virus warning that appears to come from your e-mail provider’s technical support staff. These things happen because it’s easy for a malicious programmer to "spoof" anyone’s e-mail address.

An estimated 90 percent of e-mail worms automatically scan contact lists and other files on an infected person’s computer to hunt for e-mail addresses. The worms not only send themselves to those addresses, but also churn out infected messages that appear to be from the addressees.

As a result, if you get an e-mail out of the blue that seems to be from someone you know and it has an attached file, there’s only a 50-50 chance it’s bona fide, according to Vincent Gullotto, Network Associates Inc. vice president for the McAfee Anti-Virus Emergency Response Team.

If such a message gets detected and rejected by an e-mail network’s virus-protecting software, the blocking system will fire off a response to

the purported sender - something along the lines of "Hey, you sent us a virus!"

The problem, of course, is that when an e-mail worm is on a rampage, millions of spoofed e-mails get sent, generating millions of these automatic replies from virus protection systems. So even if your computer stays clean, your inbox can fill up with messages relating to the virus.

So what should you do?

Don’t worry about the messages - as long as you subscribe to a virus-protecting service and you make sure it keeps itself up to date. The program should tell you the last time it got a new list of the Internet’s top threats.

For added peace of mind, have the program scan your computer every so often (frequent Internet users should do it at least once a week) to make sure nothing untoward has managed to sneak in.

Playing off the awareness that your computer can be an unwitting facilitator for e-mail worms and viruses, some Internet dastards will send messages that are spoofed so as to appear to be coming from technical support staff at your e-mail domain. The phony messages will tell you to click on an attachment to clean your computer - but of course, the file is a computer wrecker.

There are usually plenty of clues that this is a scam.

First, home computer users ought to be especially suspicious because Internet service providers are very unlikely to reach out to their customers this way. For proof, reply to the e-mail and see if it bounces back, or call customer service at your access provider, Gullotto advises.

And be on the alert for other signs the messages aren’t official.

I recently got one saying there was a large "ammount" of viruses emanating from my office e-mail account. The attachment claimed to include a "free anti-virus tool." Free? I would hope my company wouldn’t charge me to put virus protections on one of its machines.

E-mail spoofing is also a popular tactic for spammers - and for the crooks who send messages that appear to be from eBay, PayPal or another Web service and say your credit card has expired and you need to send in a new number, along with your user name and password.

To be safe against that potentially devastating con, known as "phishing," don’t click any hyperlinks in the e-mail, because they often will take you to a fake version of a legitimate site like eBay. And legit sites generally will not ask for your password in an e-mail.

Death2Spam: The Name Says It All

It’s almost a fantasy out of a Hollywood movie. One man, tired of lawless nasties abusing innocent people, decides to take the law into his own hands and gets revenge.

The man is Richard Jowsey, the nasties are spammers, and his revenge is

called Death2Spam, a product based on the Bayesian analysis technique which has gotten a great deal of attention in the antispam market lately.

Instead of using lists of spammers' addresses (which become quickly outdated) or phrase recognition (which is almost useless with today's spamming techniques), Bayesian analysis works by analyzing word frequencies in spam and "good" e-mails.

According to the company, Death2Spam reaches 95% accuracy out-of-the-box and exceeds 99% accuracy in about two weeks, while fewer than 1 in 10,000 legitimate messages gets misclassified as Spam. Death2Spam was developed in New Zealand and is now being sold in the U.S. by Binary Research International as either a gateway or SMTP proxy for both end-user companies and ISPs on Windows and Linux platforms.

Even better, Jowsey's company has set up a basic version Death2Spam as a publicly available proxy so that you can try it yourself free.

'Fingerprint' Service Could Stop Some Spam

E-mail provider Everyone.net says it has a new program to protect e-mail users from one by-product of the spam plague: bounced messages.

The firm is announcing an enhanced e-mail protection service called Total Protection 2.0 at the ISPCon conference in Washington, D.C. this week. The new service includes a technology called Email Fingerprint that can stop "bounce storms," in which e-mail users who have had their e-mail address stolen by spammers or e-mail worms receive a flood of returned e-mail messages.

Everyone.net calls the new feature a kind of "paternity test" for e-mail messages. The company is adding an extension header to each outbound e-mail message. That header will contain a unique signature, created with a symmetric encryption key and based on information such as the e-mail user's identification, the time stamp for the e-mail and more, says Wayne Lewis, Everyone.net's chief technology officer.

External e-mail servers will typically return the delivery instructions of the original message, called the "header," including the new fingerprint extension, and often a portion of the original message. That allows Everyone.net to search bounced messages for the signature to determine whether they came from an Everyone.net user, or are bogus bounce messages from a spammer, worm, or virus that is spoofing Everyone.net addresses, Lewis says.

"The goal is to stop bounce storms. (With Email Fingerprint) we can say with 100 percent certainty whether an e-mail message (with the signature) left our system," Lewis says.

The new technology is not a cure-all, but will help shield Everyone.net's customers from being inundated with rejection notifications for e-mail messages they never sent, according to Josh Mailman, vice president of sales and marketing.

The Total Protection 2.0 service will be available to Everyone.net's personal, business, and Internet service provider customers, Mailman says.

Bounced messages are a big problem, according to John Levine of the Internet Research Task Force's Anti-Spam Research Group.

Levine, who runs an antispam service called AbuseNet, receives between 10,000 and 20,000 bounced messages daily. However, he wonders if the Email Fingerprint will reliably let pass legitimate bounced messages, he says.

E-mail server products vary widely in what content remains from an original messages when they issue a bounce notice. It the Email Fingerprint is stripped out or altered by some programs, it could be dropped by Everyone.net's servers, Levine says.

"Bounce processing is an incredible can of worms. There are standards that are not widely adhered to and many vendors who think they are adhering to them are not," Levine adds.

Other researchers and e-mail providers are looking at the problem of bounced messages.

Recently, Earthlink said it will begin testing a plan called Sender Policy Framework (SPF) that also addresses the bounced e-mail problem. Also, America Online said in January that it is testing SPF for outgoing mail.

Both companies are publishing the IP addresses of their e-mail servers in an SPF record in the domain name system. Mail servers receiving e-mail messages claiming to come from those domains can check whether the messages came from one of the registered servers.

EarthLink Readies Anti-Phishing Tool

The e-mail appeared to be from a leading retail bank; clicking the link took users to the authentic home page - but a pop-up window led to a site registered in Moscow that sought their account numbers and PINs. It was a "phisher" scheme, and as such scams become increasingly common, ISP EarthLink is readying a free anti-phishing application designed to protect computer users from such cybercrime.

Next Monday, EarthLink is releasing ScamBlocker, a free application available to everyone - not only EarthLink customers - designed to keep Web surfers from accessing the sites phishers use to steal data.

The ISP's timing is good; such attacks are rising 50 percent each month, says the Anti-Phishing Working Group, an industry organization composed primarily of security technology vendors, which has launched an education campaign. The Federal Trade Commission calls identity theft a leading cybercrime.

In the case of the faux bank message, users naive enough to provide their personal information could find their bank accounts drained, their credit ratings ruined, or their identities stolen.

In practice, ScamBlocker is appealingly simple. The program installs inside Internet Explorer 5.x as part of EarthLink's browser toolbar (which also includes a pop-up blocker and spyware detector), and it automatically downloads a list of known phisher sites. When surfers try to access a fraudulent site, ScamBlocker redirects them to an alerts page on EarthLink's servers. Users can proceed to the scam site or report it to

the ISP’s abuse team, which tries to get the site’s host to shut it down.

But such a service is only as good as its scammer blocklist. Besides its own list of phisher sites, EarthLink pulls information from Net auction giant EBay (a popular target of phisher scams) and antispam vendor Brightmail, which unveiled an enterprise-level fraud-prevention service last December.

EarthLink is in talks with financial institutions and other common victims of phisher "brand-spoofing," but declines to name any of them, says Scott Mecredy, EarthLink senior product manager.

Also, EarthLink plans to refresh its blocklist several times daily, similar to the way antivirus applications update their viral signature databases, Mecredy says. Even so, the first users to encounter a phisher attack may still be vulnerable, says Mark Bruno, Brightmail enterprise product manager.

"As with spam or viruses, people at the front end of the curve will still be attacked," Bruno says. "But we can prevent the majority of people from getting scammed."

Shutting down the scammers will pose a bigger challenge. EarthLink recently sued spammers also suspected of phishing. But the Anti-Phishing Working Group estimates up to 70 percent of phishers operate out of Eastern Europe, making them hard to pursue, let alone prosecute.

While EarthLink’s approach is "fairly promising, these guys are limited in the volume of messages they see," says Dan Maier, an Anti-Phishing Working Group spokesperson. "How well is the EBay/EarthLink toolbar going to stop Citibank scams?"

Maier says combating phishers requires a combination of technologies, including ways to distinguish authentic Web sites from their copycats, heuristic methods to identify scams as phisher techniques evolve, and a global system to share information about attacks in real time. "In the longer run, we’re trying to engage Microsoft and other vendors to build [anti-phisher technology] into their products," Maier says. For the short term, however, he says phisher scams "are a pretty easy way to make money right now."

Pop-Up Ad Software Maker Sues Utah

A New York company whose software creates pop-up ads during routine Web browsing is seeking to block a Utah law that bans such practices.

In a lawsuit filed late Monday in 3rd District Court, WhenU.com Inc. argues that the new law violates its constitutionally protected right to advertise, while doing little to protect computer users’ privacy. The company wants the court to block the law from taking effect early next month.

WhenU provides users with free software like games and screen savers. The software comes with a separate program, SaveNow, that tracks Web traffic and matches a user’s surfing habits with particular advertisers.

The Spyware Control Act, passed earlier this year, makes it illegal to

create or install computer software that monitors Internet activity and sends the information elsewhere, usually without the user being aware of it or consenting to it.

The law also curbs pop-up advertising on the Internet and calls for penalties of $10,000 per violation.

WhenU insists its software is installed only with permission and doesn't invade privacy.

Paul Murphy, spokesman for the Utah Attorney General's Office, declined to comment Tuesday, saying his office had not yet seen the lawsuit.

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